

Fredericton Anti - Poverty

The Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization was formed in March of 1983. A small group of men and women who had become fed up with living in poverty. They were concerned with the government cut-backs that were occurring across the country especially in the middle of a prolonged recession. The immediate result was a corresponding increase in the rate and intensity of the impoverished happening to working class people like themselves. The long term reality was the need to organize against this growing poverty situation.

After a joint demonstration with the Saint John Anti-Poverty Organization against the Ben-tax rip-off; a series of organizational meetings were held to form the Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization.

The Hatfield Government brought down its first 'restraint' budget soon after the birth of FAPO. This budget seemed like it was restraint on money going to the needs of the people, and a free flow of money to Big Business. True to form, the government attacked the weakest section of the population first. They sent out teams of investigators to look for welfare cheaters while making a big media campaign out of it in order to slander and intimidate the recipients. Then they removed the supplements for winter fuel, school supplies, dental etc.

FAPO took up the fight against these policies as best it could. In conjunction with the Saint John Organization, Anti-Poverty campaigned through the media, with briefs and meetings, and with demonstrations against these government cutbacks. "The Government must not put their economic crisis on to the backs of the poor and the working people." FAPO achieved a small victory with the reinstatement of some of the cuts to welfare notably the fuel supplement.

Throughout the spring and summer of 83, FAPO continued to develop a public image. There was no choice as the media seemed to be around all the time. FAPO held many interviews, made many statements and talked to many groups about the poverty situation.

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Internally, FAPO developed into a relatively active group. People enjoyed the meetings, and a level of at least one meeting per week was not hard to sustain. There was no formal membership, but rather if you wanted to participate you were a member and you had one vote. FAPO had an executive of three, a constitution, and it was incorporated as a non-profit organization.

During the Fall of 1983 the organization held regular meetings alternately on each side of the river. In September the first issue of the Anti-Poverty News was produced, a welfare handbook was completed; and as the fall progressed, the group held fund-raising activities to supplement our meager income. FAPO rented office space from the Women's Center and furnished it with a donated copier and gestetner. The first

issue of the "Hatfield Comix" appeared in October. In October as well, Anti-Poverty joined with Labour to form the Provincial Alliance. The Alliance held a partially successful demonstration against cutbacks attracting upwards of 1000 people. FAPO was anxious to further its contact with all Alliance members.

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On the other side of the political spectrum, FAPO had gotten involved with more traditionally conservative organizations in the so-called Voluntary Sector. The Government had decided to pass on its responsibility for dealing with poverty to community voluntary agencies. 'Aid' to the poor was now to become community-based rather than Government based. The Government wanted to set-up food banks, kitchens, shelters etc. with very little financial backing on their part. It was obvious that the ranks of the poor would continue to grow, and at the same time when the people needed their Government the most, the government could do nothing more but introduce beggary on a mass scale. These middle-class voluntary organizations did not and do not accept this situation willingly. For this reason and to counter the governments political line, FAPO became involved in what was called by government the "Steering Committee on Community Voluntary Action."

This involvement with government created a big debate in the organization. The Saint John organization that was established in 1972, had a policy of accepting no government grants. FAPO came to the viewpoint that government no matter which Party ran it, was going to continue to cutback services in the future. The effects of these cutbacks was to grow exponentially in the population, and would undoubtedly be met with resistance from the people affected. For example, the provincial organization of voluntary agencies in B.C. have notified the government that they will close down all the food banks, kitchens, shelters etc. by the spring of 1986 if the government does not move directly to solve the growing problem of poverty. These agencies are overwhelmed by numbers of poor people that they are seeing, and are shocked by the predominate numbers of "nouveau poor."

FAPO will take money from available sources at the discretion of the membership. All FAPO activities are based on the principle of developing the social politics and consciousness of being anti-poverty, of being against the impoverishment of many to ensure the enrichment of just a few.

FAPO realizes that as an organization it can help people on a day to day basis as well if the organization can obtain the money. FAPO has developed a center for the distribution of badly needed items. With a base such as this, the

organization has been able to do activities on a wider area.

The ground work for the Distribution Resource Center was done over the winter. Members reduced meetings to once a week. The Women's Center for the poor took over the space at 629 King Street.

FAPO had developed friendly relations with the Kinsmen who helped with a party for 60 kids and their parents. They took the group their facility on a number of occasions.

For the first year FAPO received money from donations, from friends and from members. FAPO held its first general meeting in May of 1983. The membership elected another executive committee for the coming year. FAPO received money from Social Services for the Distribution Resource Center. In June FAPO sent three members to the Labour convention in Vancouver. The members came back with the idea of a strictly political literature group.

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The spring and summer of 1983 saw a number of joint actions carried out by Fredericton and Saint John groups. The Health Services Dept. was occupied by members protesting the continued government cutbacks; submitted a brief against restraint policies; and a media fight against the second issue of the Conservative government.

During the latter days of 1983, FAPO developed contacts on a wider basis. Members were invited to a research organization called the National Anti-Poverty Organization. The organization now terminated social policy research. The National Anti-Poverty Organization is an affiliate group. The Organization applied for money from an international agency called PLURA, which was discussed at a conference in late summer.

"...during the latter summer, F.A.P.O. developed contacts on a wider, more national basis. Members were invited to join 'Gatt-fly'..."

University. FAPO's connections, with community groups and with the Voluntary sector, are of a nature in the fight against poverty. Only organization that was